

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 OMB-01 IO-13 /090 W

-----041709Z 068500 /47

P R 041352Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2663

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOPN, PINT, PFOR, LE, SY

SUBJECT: GOL ESTABLISHES PRESS CENSORSHIP, APPARENTLY ENDING PRESS
CRISIS

DEPT PASS USIA

ALGIERS FOR ROSS

1. SUMMARY: IN FIRST ACT UNDER EMERGENCY LEGISLATIVE POWERS, GOL HAS ESTABLISHED SYSTEM OF PRIOR PRESS CENSORSHIP. MOVE COMES AS NO SURPRISE, AND IS AT LEAST AS MUCH IN RESPONSE TO SYRIAN PRESSURES AS IN RESPONSE TO THE GOLS OWN FELT NEED. BEIRUT'S "PRESS CRISIS" SEEM TO HAVE ENDED WITH IRRESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM THE PRINCIPAL LOSER, ALTHOUGH THE RESPONSIBLE PRESS AND THE PRESTIGE OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT HAVE ALSO SUFFERED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE GOVERNMENT MOVES. COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, PRE-SIDED OVER BY PRESIDENT SARKIS, MET JAN 1, THEN ISSUED FIRST LEGISLATIVE DECREES UNDER EXTRAORDINARY LEGISLATIVE POWER GRANTED TO GOVERNMENT BY PARLIAMENT ON DEC 24. "LEGISLATIVE DECREE NUMBER ONE" ESTABLISHES SYSTEM OF PRIOR PRESS CENSORSHIP, AND "LEGISLATIVE DECREE NUMBER TWO" ESTABLISHES SIMILAR CENSORSHIP OF THEATRICAL PRODUCTION.

3. TEXT OF DECREE. INFORMAL EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF LEGISLATIVE DECREE NUMBER ONE, AS PUBLISHED JAN 3 IN BYRAQ, AS FOLLOWS:

BEGIN QUOTE:

ARTICLE (1) ALL PUBLICATIONS ARE SUBJECTED TO THE PRIOR CENSORSHIP OF THE PUBLIC SECURITY DIRECTORATE
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(SURETE GENERAL), WHICH IS AUTHORIZED TO CANCEL TOTALLY OR PARTIALLY MATERIALS PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION. THE DIRECTORATE MAY ALSO FORBID ISSUANCE OF PUBLICATIONS PRESENTED FOR CENSORSHIP, IF IT SEEMS NECESSARY.

ARTICLE (2) IF ANY PUBLICATION IS ISSUED CONTRARY TO ARTICLE (1) ABOVE, ITS ISSUES ARE CONFISCATED BY A DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PUBLIC SECURITY, AND ITS APPEARANCE IS SUSPENDED BY HIS DECISION. THE SUSPENSION REMAINS EFFECTIVE UNTIL THE CASE IS DECIDED BY THE PUBLICATIONS COURT.

RESPONSIBLE PERSONS ARE PUNISHED ONE YEAR UP TO THREE YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT, AND FINED FROM 5,000 TO 15,000 LL. THE PENALTY SHOULD NOT BE LESS THAN ONE MONTH IMPRISONMENT. (EMBASSY COMMENT: APPARENT INCONSISTENCY IS IN ARABIC TEXT. MEANING MAY BE THAT PUNISHMENTS ARE TO BE GENERALLY BETWEEN ONE AND THREE YEARS, BUT IN ANY CASE NOT LESS THAN ONE MONTH. END COMMENT.)

THE COURT IS AUTHORIZED TO DIRECT THE SUSPENSION OF THE PUBLICATION AND ITS NON-APPEARANCE FOR A PERIOD FROM ONE TO THREE MONTHS, INCLUDING THE PREVIOUS SUSPENSION PERIOD IMPLEMENTED BY THE DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PUBLIC SECURITY.

ARTICLE (3) IF ANY PUBLICATION DISREGARDS THE ABOVE ARTICLE (1) FOR A SECOND TIME, THE PENALTY SHALL NOT BE LESS THAN TWO MONTHS IMPRISONMENT. COURT TIME FOR DECISION IN ALL CASES SHALL NOT EXCEED TWO WEEKS AFTER DATE OF TRANSMITTAL.

ARTICLE (4) DECISIONS BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PUBLIC SECURITY TAKEN WITH REGARD TO THIS DECREE ARE NOT SUBJECT TO ANY REVISION, ADMINISTRATIVE OR JUDICIAL, AND AFFECTED PERSONS HAVE NO CLAIM TO COMPENSATION AS A RESULT.

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ARTICLE (5) THIS LEGISLATIVE DECREE IS EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING ITS POSTING AT THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER ON MONDAY, JANUARY 3, 1977.
END OF QUOTE

4. THE CENSORS' JOB: ACCORDING TO ANWAR, GOL IMMEDIATELY ORGANIZED TEAM OF TWENTY CENSORS. ACCORDING TO BOTH ANWAR AND THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, THE CENSORS WILL KEEP AN EYE ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS: CONFESSIONAL PROBLEMS; DISAVOWALS OF THE ENTITY OF THE STATE; INCITEMENTS TO PARTITION; INSULTS AGAINST THE PRESIDENT; MATTERS TENDING TO DISTURB LEBANON'S RELATIONS WITH ARAB AND OTHER FRIENDLY COUNTRIES; ARAB SECURITY FORCE MOVEMENTS; AND ARMS ARRANGEMENTS.

5. COMMENT: NO SURPRISE. FORMAL PRESS CENSORSHIP HAS BEEN BRUIED ABOUT AT LEAST SINCE SARKIS' INAUGURATION IN SEPTEMBER. OTHER ARAB STATES HAVE LONG BEEN UNHAPPY WITH THE FREE-WHEELING BEIRUT PRESS, AND IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT SARKIS MADE COMMITMENTS TO ARAB LEADERS TO BRING THE PRESS UNDER CONTROL AT THE CAIRO SUMMIT IN OCTOBER.

6. AN OLD PROBLEM. PRIOR TO THE CIVIL WAR, A PRESS LAW EXISTED, BUT IT WAS HONORED MOSTLY IN THE BREACH. WITH A FEW NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, SUCH AS AN NAHAR, CONTROLLED BY THE FAMILY OF FORMER MINISTER GHASSAN TUEINI, THE BEIRUT PRESS HAS BEEN IN THE PAY AND SERVICE OF VARIOUS MILITIA ORGANIZATIONS ON THE RIGHT, AND THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ AND LIBYA ON THE LEFT.

7. "SELF-CENSORSHIP" EXPERIMENT. PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AL-HOSS GOVERNMENT, THE BEIRUT PRESS CORPS ITSELF, SEEING THE WRITING ON THE WALL, TRIED TO INSTITUTE A SYSTEM OF "SELF CENSORSHIP," UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF PRESS SYNDICATE CHAIRMAN TAHA AND NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY
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DIRECTOR MASHNOUQ. SARKIS HIMSELF SUPPORTED THESE EFFORTS THROUGHOUT NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER, AND INDEED THE PRESS BECAME NOTABLY RESTRAINED (AND UNINFORMATIVE ON SOME VERY INTERESTING SUBJECTS, SUCH AS CRITICISM OF AND RESISTANCE TO THE SYRIAN ASF TROOPS).

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DEPT PASS USIA

ALGIERS FOR ROSS

8. SYRIAN BLUDGEON TACTICS AGAINST THE PRESS. THE SYRIANS, HOWEVER, WERE NOT SATISFIED. SYRIAN FORCES, APPARENTLY WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OR PRIOR APPROVAL OF ANYONE IN THE GOL, BEGAN IN MID-DECEMBER TO CLOSE DOWN A NUMBER OF LEFTIST PAPERS, INCLUDING AS SAFIR AND AL MUHARRIR. THESE STEPS SURPRISED NO ONE IN BEIRUT, AND EVEN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS HERE, IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, EXPRESSED UNDERSTANDING OF THE SYRIAN MOVES. A CRISIS WAS PRECIPITATED WHEN THE SYRIAN FORCES CLOSED DOWN THE PRESTIGIOUS AND INDEPENDENT, LEBANESE-CONTROLLED AN NAHAR (AND, FOR TECHNICAL REASONS, ITS FRENCH-LANGUAGE SISTER L'ORIENT-LE JOUR) JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS (AND INADVERTENTLY AND TEMPORARILY EXPELLED UPI AND NEWSWEEK JOURNALISTS, WHOSE OFFICES HAPPENED TO BE IN THE AN NAHAR BUILDING).

9. SYRIAN BLUDGEON TACTICS AGAINST THE GOL. ONE REASON FOR SYRIAN DISPLEASURE WITH AN NAHAR WAS ITS CONTINUED COVERAGE OF THE STATEMENTS AND DOINGS OF CRITICS OF SYRIAN POLICY, SUCH AS KEMAL JUNBLATT AND RAYMOND EDDE. HOWEVER, IN RESTROSPECT, SYRIAN CLOSURE OF AN NAHAR MAY HAVE BEEN MORE GENERALLY A TACTIC TO PRESSURE SARKIS AND THE GOL TO INSTITUTE A SYSTEM MORE EFFECTIVE THAN MERE SELF-CENSORSHIP, ALTHOUGH INFORMED GOL CIRCLES HAVE PERSISTENTLY TOLD US THAT THE GOL WAS PLANNING A CENSORSHIP LAW PRIOR TO THE AN NAHAR CLOSURE ANYWAY. AN NAHAR PUBLISHER TUEINI SAW SARKIS DEC 28, AND AN AN NAHAR STAFF SOURCE TOLD US SHORTLY THEREAFTER THAT THEY WERE HOPEFUL THE PAPER WOULD BE ALLOWED TO REAPPEAR IN A FEW DAYS. BOTH PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS VISITED DAMASCUS DURING THE SAME WEEK, AND IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT THE PRESS SITUATION WAS ONE OF THEIR PRINCIPAL CONCERNS.
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(TUEINI HIMSELF LEFT FOR PARIS DEC 30, A MOVE INTERPRETED BY MANY AS A FORM OF PROTEST, EVEN SELF-EXILE, ALTHOUGH THE AN NAHAR STAFF TELLS US HE HAD OTHER BUSINESS IN PARIS AND IN THE US, AND TUEINI HIMSELF LATER IN PARIS, ACCORDING TO "THE ARAB WORLD" OF JAN 3, DENIED THAT HIS TRIP HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE PRESS PROBLEM.)

10. A NEW ERA FOR THE BEIRUT PRESS. WHATEVER THE NATURE OF INTRA-LEBANESE AND LEBANESE-SYRIAN NEGOTIATION DURING THE CRISIS, THE SYRIAN FORCES WITHDREW FROM THE AN NAHAR BUILDING ON JAN 2, THE DAY AFTER THE DECREE WAS PROMULGATED, AND THE STAFFS OF BOTH AN NAHAR AND L'ORIENT WENT BACK TO WORK ON JAN 3. L'ORIENT REAPPEARED THE MORNING OF JAN 4. AN NAHAR DID NOT APPEAR BECAUSE OF TECHNICAL REASONS, BUT FRANCOIS AKL, L'ORIENT EDITOR, TELLS US AN NAHAR SHOULD REAPPEAR IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AS WELL AS OTHER WEST BEIRUT NEWS-PAPERS, SUCH AS BOTH AS SAFIR AND AL MUHARRIR. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE WEST BEIRUT BRANCH OF THE CENSORSHIP OFFICE IS NOT YET COMPLETELY ORGANIZED.

11. FOREIGN PRESS TO BE CENSORED. IT IS GENERALLY EXPECTED THAT CENSORSHIP WILL BE APPLIED AS WELL TO THE FOREIGN PRESS AGENCIES. EARLY JAN 4, NBC CORRESPONDENT BILL LORD TOLD US THAT FOREIGN PRESS CORPS HAS SO FAR ENCOUNTERED NO DIFFICULTIES, BUT THAT CENSORS ARE EXPECTED TO APPEAR SOON. HE SAID, AND EMBASSY AGREES, THAT ENTIRE CENSORSHIP EFFORT IS AIMED PRIMARILY AT THE LOCAL PRESS--WHICH WILL DISTINGUISH IT FROM GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP IN ISRAEL.
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Message Attributes

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Subject: GOL ESTABLISHES PRESS CENSORSHIP, APPARENTLY ENDING PRESS CRISIS DEPT PASS USIA
TAGS: SOPN, PINT, PFOR, LE, SY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/50d2e4dd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
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